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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 560th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 5 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE FIFTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 11) (document without a symbol)

1. Mr. KISHIMORI (Rapporteur), introducing the draft report of the fifty-second session of the Executive Committee, said that Slovenia should be added to the list of States in paragraph 29 (a). Once approved, the final version of the report would include, as annexes, the High Commissioner's opening statement and the summing up of the General Debate by the Chairman. The complete report would be submitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the annual report of the High Commissioner.

2. Mr. ZIARAN (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, as it stood, paragraph 22 (b) of the draft report was inconsistent with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. His delegation therefore proposed the insertion of the phrase "consistent with their voluntarily undertaken commitments and obligations" at the end of the paragraph.

3. Mr. ALFELD (South Africa) said that he endorsed the amendment made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but preferred the formulation "consistent with their commitments and obligations".

4. Mr. RIMKUNAS (Observer for Lithuania) said that Lithuania had applied for observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee and should therefore be included in the list of States appearing in paragraph 29 (b) of the draft report.

5. The report of the fifty-second session of the Executive Committee, as orally amended, was adopted.

CLOSING STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

6. Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the panel discussions at the current session of the Executive Committee had been extremely useful and relevant, especially those focusing on the role of women and the protection of female refugees. He noted with satisfaction that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), while maintaining their critical stance, had voiced their unequivocal support for a strong UNHCR. The lack of gender balance among UNHCR staff was certainly a theme that needed to be addressed. Now that the new UNHCR senior management team was in place, it was time to start work in earnest.

7. Durable solutions to refugee problems were an investment in peace and stability. Refugees were highly vulnerable to exploitation by armed elements and criminal networks, and UNHCR had an important role to play in preventing them from falling into the hands of such unscrupulous operators. The war on terrorism had rightly become a central preoccupation. But the focus on fighting terrorism should not weaken other aspects of the refugee protection regime, nor should it be used to whip up xenophobia and discrimination. The misconception that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was an instrument that provided a safe haven for criminals and terrorists needed to be vigorously challenged. Although the need to

guard against abuses of the asylum regime was perfectly legitimate, it was even more important to ensure that refugees were not associated with terrorism. In that connection, the unfolding Afghan refugee crisis should be addressed through concerted action and in a spirit of generous burden-sharing.

8. He had noted that there was a general desire to place UNHCR on a sound financial footing, and he trusted that the promised contributions for the rest of the financial year would materialize in the coming weeks and months. In the meantime, the generous response to the Afghan crisis should not be allowed to eclipse the pressing needs of other groups of refugees around the world.

9. Soft commitments were a new initiative that had certainly enabled UNHCR to forecast future levels of funding with greater accuracy, but at the same time the commitments themselves needed to be more generous. At the very least, donors should maintain existing levels of contributions. The budget was currently underfunded by about 10 per cent; a larger deficit would seriously compromise the quality and performance of UNHCR's work.

10. While it was true that refugees were a high-risk group for HIV/AIDS, it was gratifying to note that the disease was not a taboo subject in refugee camps and thus the problem was being dealt with frankly. HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes should be at the top of UNHCR's agenda.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION (agenda item 12)

11. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the CHAIRMAN declared the fifty-second session of the Executive Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.